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ABSTRACT

Despite their accomplishments in providing practical and efficient programs to a wide spectrum of their communities, the roles and benefits of community colleges are frequently misunderstood or understated, leading to severe underfunding. Legislators and researchers use the number of associate degrees awarded as the sole indicator of the institution's effectiveness. However, student goals at Miami-Dade Community College (M-DCC), in Florida, for example, encompass far more than the achievement of associate degrees. M-DCC provides career workshops and placements, business consulting services, and legal and counseling services. M-DCC also services the community by operating art galleries, presenting dance and musical performances, participating in partnerships and outreach programs, opening college athletic facilities to the public, and providing free health care services. Specific accomplishments for M-DCC for the 1992-93 academic year include the following: (1) 77,525 students were enrolled in college credit courses and 37,371 were enrolled in occupational and special courses; (2) 19,517 students improved basic skills or English proficiency; and (3) 68,485 students had achieved academic success in college level work, 9,709 left M-DCC with transferable courses, 3,386 completed associate in arts degrees, 8,263 left with specific occupational skills, 14,385 were employed and upgraded their job skills, and 1,179 students completed associate in science degrees. (TGI)

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hat did the people of Florida receive in return for a $ MILLION investment in Miami-Dade Community College?

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What did the people of Florida receive in return for a $98 million investment in Miami-Dade Community College?

Community colleges are the most American of institutions. Their foundation is belief in the value of every individual. They are committed to serving the residents of their communities with practical and efficient programs that are matched to the wide spectrum of student goals for self improvement.

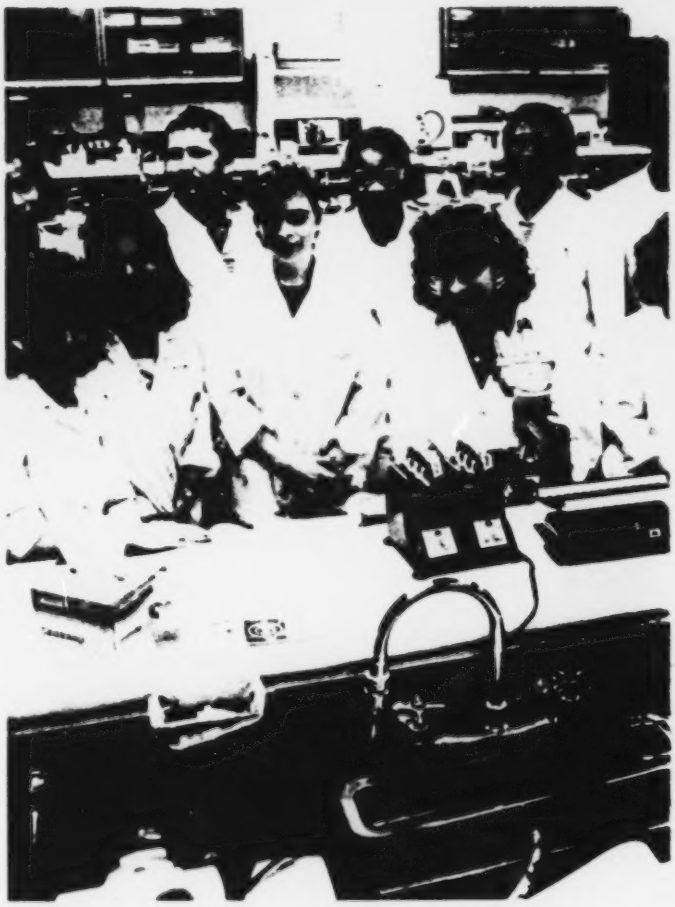
These extraordinarily productive institutions are an exceptional bargain. Yet, the roles and the benefits of community colleges are frequently misunderstood, understated, or taken for granted. Their singular accomplishments are not fully appreciated or valued. This has led to severe underfunding.

Urban community colleges such as Miami-Dade, are the first step for a majority of students who would not be admissible to other institutions. Many of these students are searching for their futures and they adjust their goals as they gain community college experience.

Legislators and researchers, however, tend to use the number of associate degrees awarded as the sole indicator of the institution's effectiveness. It is assumed that everyone who does not get an associate degree is a "dropout."

Published articles have characterized community colleges as inefficient, dead ends, or traps for minority students. Papers have stated that community college retention is not as good as that of four-year colleges and universities. In these cases, the model for comparison is the four-year college, its students, and its goals. Unfortunately, the comparisons never take into account the wide array of circumstances and goals of community college students; they are far less academically prepared, more likely to be from a deprived low-income background, and are often living at home, working, and attending school part-time.

Today, community colleges are more important to America than ever before. Business and industry report that 80 percent of high school graduates will need some postsecondary education—mostly less than two years—to meet job requirements. At the same time, an increasing per-



Carolyn Herring

Carolyn, a single parent, was an active participant in service-learning projects at the Ann Marie Adker Overtown Health Clinic when she was enrolled in a short occupational program in medical recordkeeping. She continued volunteering after she successfully completed the program, and is now a full-time employee at the clinic.

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Vincent Dotson

Almost two years ago, while he was employed by a national chain of discount stores in a lower-level job, Vincent enrolled in remedial communication courses at Miami-Dade. He raised his skills to college-entry level and, as a result, he received a promotion and was transferred to California. Upon his return to Miami, Vincent re-enrolled and qualified for the Honors English course. Vincent is now taking college level courses, and credits Miami-Dade as the catalyst in his development.

centage of young Americans lack the fundamental communication skills needed for productive employment.

Studies have shown that business and industry want virtually the same skills in a beginning employee as colleges want in an entering student. It is very evident that students who are deficient in communication skills and who then gain those skills, through developmental programs in community colleges, are more employable and have opened new doors to future opportunities. They have attained an important goal.

Another significant group of students, who are usually reported as dropouts, are those who aspire to a baccalaureate degree and begin in a community college with no expectation of completing an associate degree. They know the community college will provide a nurturing experience and a good start in collegiate education. They stay for approximately one year, to get accustomed to college level work and to earn credits to transfer on to universities. If they transfer in good standing, they have achieved their objective in the community college. At Miami-Dade, in 1992-93, there were twice as many of these students as there were students who completed academic associate degrees before transferring.

When the community college record is carefully analyzed, it is clear that the benefits to the community are impressive. The Community College educational system is the most effective and efficient system in America. Based on their fundamental values, their attitudes, and their experience, they are prepared, as are no other institutions, to provide services to the students who choose to enroll.

Community college student goals encompass far more than the achievement of associate degrees. Individuals arrive at community colleges with a myriad of deficiencies and problems, a considerable spread of goals, and, in many cases, no clear goal at all.

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Community college students enroll:

- to gain proficiency in English;
- to gain proficiency in English as a first step to other programs;
- to gain communication skills;
- to gain communication skills as a first step to other programs;
- to complete one semester or more of college courses, gain collegiate experience in a supportive environ-ment, and earn credits before transferring to a four-year college;
- to complete an associate degree for transfer to the upper division of a four-year college;
- to complete a specific occupational course or program;
- to upgrade occupational competencies related to current employment or promotion opportunities;
- to complete individual courses, or an associate degree, for personal development

These student goals all contribute to the quality of life in our communities: they contribute to employability and the development of a superior work force. Community college students pursue practical goals and community colleges provide practical programs that lead to student success.

Daisy Barroso

In 1991, Daisy began her work at Miami-Dade in a student development course. Later she proceeded to the Honors Program, and worked as a student journalist for the North Campus paper, first as a staff writer then as features editor. Through the Honors Program and the student newspaper, she received scholarship support and participated in the 1992 summer study abroad program. In 1993, Daisy transferred to Florida International University, and continued to work part-time as a substitute teacher and a mental health technician. In December of 1994, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and begins work full-time this spring; she plans to pursue a Master's Degree in the same field.

Terresa Edgecombe

Terresa attended Miami-Dade to improve her opportunities for promotion at Great Western Bank. Since that time, Terresa has been promoted to vice president and is now a branch manager. She gives credit to Miami-Dade for enabling her to upgrade her skills, thus increasing her opportunity to succeed.

Dr. Pablo Fonseca

In June of 1980, Pablo immigrated from Cuba during the Mariel boatlift. Two years later, he graduated from Miami-Dade with high honors. In 1984, he graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science Degree, majoring in Microbiology and Cell Sciences. Pablo completed his doctoral degree at Indiana University School of Dentistry, with honors and awards from the Indianapolis District Dental Society and the East Coast District Dental Society. His personal philosophy: "This great country is a place of unlimited opportunities. As long as you try hard and you know where you are going, the sky's the limit."

"I will always be grateful to Miami-Dade and my professors for giving me the initial start and support in achieving my educational and professional goals."

Miami-Dade Community College

The following information, from the 1992-93 academic year at Miami-Dade, illustrates the variety of ways in which a community college provides a return on the investment through instructional programs.

Enrollment—Students enrolled and receiving services:

77,525	College Credit
37,371	Occupational and Special Courses
114,896	**Total**

Students who gained communication skills:

In the Information Age, communication skills are a requirement for most employment. The following data show the number of students who improved those skills, learned English, or raised those skills to college entry level. If those students go no further now, they have increased their employability and have opened options for productive futures.

Students who gained communication skills:

19,517	Improved basic skills or English proficiency
10,507	Unduplicated total who achieved college entry-level skills; distribution by area of deficiency:
3,121	Reading
3,812	Writing
4,351	Mathematics
1,605	English Language Proficiency

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Students who achieved success:

Were in good standing and had achieved academic success in college level work or occupational credit work. They can continue at Miami-Dade or transfer to other institutions;	**68,485**
Continued their enrollment the next year;	**31,529**
Left with transferrable courses;	**9,709**
Completed Associate in Arts degrees (first two years of a baccalaureate degree);	**3,386**
Left with specific occupational skills;	**8,263**
Were employed and upgraded their job skills;	**14,385**
Completed Associate in Science degrees (two-year occupational programs).	**1,179**

Michael Uselton

In 1983, Michael enrolled in the Funeral Services program at the North Campus. Because of limited access to the few schools offering mortuary science, Michael feels fortunate to have attended Miami-Dade, which has a full-service facility. In 1984, he earned an Associate in Science degree, and is now vice president of Funeral Operations for 23 funeral homes, located throughout the country, operated by Gibraltar Mauseleum Corporation in Indianapolis, Indiana. Michael is so enthusiastic about Miami-Dade that he regularly seeks qualified prospective employees from among graduates of the Funeral Services program.

Summary of Instructional Product

It is clear that 4,565 associate degrees awarded in 1992-93 represent only the tip of the iceberg in achievement of student goals. The following is a summary of goals achieved by Miami-Dade students in one year.

Achieved college entry-level skills	**10,507**
Completed a collegiate transfer goal	**13,095**
Completed an occupational goal	**23,827**
Unduplicated Total	**46,005**

Jorge Sierra

Jorge is a young Cuban whose superior academic skills enabled him to attend the University of Havana's School of Computer Science. In 1992, through the family reclamation process, Jorge emigrated to the United States. His first goal was to learn English at Miami-Dade.
In 1994, this 23-year-old computer whiz earned an Associate in Arts-Computer Science degree and has become fluent in English. He has been a programmer and software developer since he got to Miami, and is working toward a Bachelor of Science degree at Florida International University.

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Services to the Community

The "community" in community colleges indicates that the mission of the colleges is not limited to instruction—it is also to enhance the quality of community life. Most of these additional services and programs do not appear in any funding formula. They can be considered a bonus. They are either by-products of the instructional program, such as music and theatre performing groups, or are based on funds raised from a variety of sources.

It is in these areas that community colleges have demonstrated their entrepreneurial acumen through non-instructional programs of service, community outreach, and cultural events.

The following non-inclusive list illustrates the array of community service programs at Miami-Dade Community College. This is part of the unrecognized product of the institution.

Programs of Direct Service

Over five thousand individuals a year are served in the Dental Hygiene Clinic and the Eye Care Clinic.

All of the indigent deceased persons in Dade County are prepared for burial and interred in Potter's Field by the Funeral Services Department.

Childcare professionals are provided with seminars and workshops. In addition, the college operates a childcare placement service and provides consulting services to community childcare organizations

Minority business owners receive consulting services and other support from the Entrepreneurial Center.

A minority Business Incubator Center is being developed at the Homestead Campus.

Children of divorcing parents, who are indigent or represented by legal aid, are provided with coping skills through college-organized workshops.

Job seekers benefit from mall-based job fairs that include workshops on employability skills, resume writing, and contact with potential employers.

More than ten community-based organizations are provided with on-campus space and support.

National testing programs are held on campuses.

Those facing career or life changes receive counseling and support services. Individuals are referred to programs in any of the educational institutions in South Florida.

Cultural Events and Performances

The college is a substantial part of its community's cultural life.

A six-month calendar lists nearly 200 events.

The college operates five public art galleries.

The Miami Book Fair International is recognized as the premier book fair in America. Half a million book lovers are drawn to the combination of a street fair, featuring books from around the world, and year-round presentations by over 100 authors.

Residents countywide enjoy over a hundred dance and musical performances by students and professional groups.

Women leaders, from countries participating in the 1994 Summit of the Americas, attended the Women's Hemispheric Conference, initiated and operated by the college.

Hispanic, African American, and Chinese residents celebrate their ethnic heritage at festivals organized by the college.

Reaching Out to the Community

Miami-Dade Community College is organized to benefit the community by reaching out, with service from faculty and staff as well as students. The emphasis in this area is growing through the service-learning concept. Student community work is being integrated into the curriculum, as part of the student learning experience and as a service to the community.

Open Airways for Kids Program: Elementary school children are provided with an asthma information program.

Scientist for a Day: Elementary school children are hosted by various medically related programs for a day-long presentation.

Growing Up Healthy: Students of three inner-city elementary schools receive physical examinations and are provided with dental and vision screening, needed immunization, and medical records.

Amblyopia Screening: Over 900 elementary school students have been screened for amblyopia by nursing students and faculty.

Medical School for Kids: Approximately 30 disadvantaged minority students participate in an annual eight-week summer school dropout prevention program.

Agape Project: North Campus education students tutor students from three inner-city elementary schools, three afternoons a week.

Black Student Opportunity Program: High school students participate in this dropout prevention program with a 90+ percent success rate; the program includes scholarship support after graduation.

Maya Angelou Elementary School: The Wolfson Campus has entered into a partnership for the development of a model school. The college will serve as liaison between the school and community-based corporations, and will offer a variety of assistance.

Use of college athletic facilities: The college believes that its facilities belong to the public and should be made available whenever possible. It is estimated that over 100,000 people use the athletic facilities every year. This includes the very successful Warren Cromarti baseball camp for youngsters, and summer baseball and basketball leagues.

Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolence: Individuals and community groups participate in workshops to provide skills in nonviolent conflict resolution.

Strategic planning sessions: A variety of local nonprofit groups are assisted in developing strategic plans for their organizations.

Teacher training in telecommunications: Staff from five public schools receive telecommunication training at the Kendall Campus.

Downtown Student Ambassador Program: Wolfson Campus students serve as "citizen ambassadors" for downtown visitors and tourists by providing information, directions, and an overall feeling of security in the downtown area.

Respiratory Care Services: Over 18,000 patients in six Dade County hospitals receive respiratory care services by faculty and students.

Overtown Merchants Alliance, Inc.: In the severely depressed neighborhood of Overtown, the owners of 47 existing small businesses discuss enhancement and development with potential public and private sector partners in meetings organized by the college.

Overtown Neighborhood Partnerships Program: Low-income residents engage in a collaborative process, organized by the Medical Center Campus, leading toward systemic change for the social and physical transformation of the neighborhood.

In Summary

Miami-Dade is effective, efficient, and essential to our community. Yet, like other community colleges, Miami-Dade operates with far less funding for its instructional services than four-year colleges.

In addition to all the services and opportunities previously mentioned, Miami-Dade also trains all of the police, all of the firefighters, all of the paramedics, two out of three of the county's registered nurses, and provides over 20 health career programs, graduates over two thirds of the registered nurses in Dade County, and provides approximately $3 million of free health care services to Dade County each year.

Because of the importance of its services and programs, community leaders have stated that they cannot imagine what Miami would be like without Miami-Dade Community College. This institution has consistently responded to the people, issues, and problems of the community. It has become a fundamental and essential part of Miami.

In 1992-93, Floridians received an abundant return for their $98 million investment in Miami-Dade Community College. It was more than anyone could have hoped for or expected.

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Florida is on the verge of irretrievably damaging the community colleges' capacity to be a constructive resource for the people of our state.

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